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PAROLE:

A Challenge For The Future

What We Can Do In The 80's To Make A Difference

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INTROSPECT

From time to time throughout the present decade many of us in the field of corrections have undoubtedly trifled with a new idea - at least in our minds - that would impact desirable change in the system if certain conditions prevailed and sufficient time permitted one to draft the idea into a workable proposal. Throughout the past several years one such issue or idea has disturbed this writer's perspective more times than he cares to remember, but the element of time will most always lend itself to procrastination with heavy contrast. To rationalize a bit further, good ideas are simply good ideas, unless time permits appropriate documentation and edification. This still hasn't changed, the importance of time today, it seems, seldom gives way to extensive ideas, unless, of course, an idea become so compelling that it deserves collective recognition and action. The idea, then, often times, becomes a challenge. Looking ahead, the next decade will produce many challenges, some by design, others by the changing times, and yet others, out of necessity. Corrections in Pennsylvania, naturally, will have to cope with these challenges.

This report will focus on a specific challenge for the Board of Probation and Parole for the next several years. The idea, I

believe many people will agree, has been generally overlooked or sorely neglected, but all along it has been right under our noses.

THE PAST TEN

From the late sixties and early seventies we became obsessed with the idea that higher education would dramatically change the direction and effectiveness of 'treatment' services rendered by this agency. The term "panacea per se" seemed to be equated, or at least highly correlated with college education. Although few people today, would agree that education has yet to provide a total remedy to the correctional process, many could hardly disagree that it has had profound and collective impact on what we know how to do best as a public service agency. We talked about professionalization, specialization, and expertise with expectations that each would produce some sort of magic or have a "crystal ball" effect to our operations. We looked toward in-service training, out-service training, workshops, seminars and groups to advance theory and practice. In reality, we did all of this and more. Precisely, the Board achieved a desirable plateau in terms of higher education and specialized training within the agency. Amid the obsession we seemed to be saying that progress in our system was our most important product or goal.

THE FUTURE TEN

It should come to no one's surprise that clients confined to a state - or county - institution are subject to a wide variety of myths, rumors, distorted opinion, the "grapevine" and untold other "outside" avenues of information that "help" the client develop an attitude of indifference toward his/her eventual release, supervision and community adjustment. After a lengthy - or even short - period of confinement and a daily ration of preconceived ideas about the parole process, what kind of understanding is the client expected to show while under supervision. To this writer's knowledge, no intensive, specific or standardized program has ever been implemented to mitigate the years of negative influence that - without a doubt - has had ill effect and significant impact on behavior and adjustment of the client under supervision. Institutional parole staff are probably most aware of the "attitude formations" that the confined individual is exposed to and its magnitude and certainty on shaping clients' perceptions. Basically stated, most clients have a poor understanding of what parole is all about. Many do not know the difference between probation and parole. Some cannot recall if they were actually former probationers or parolees. Others do not know if prior supervision was carried out by a county probation officer or a state parole agent. The role of the probation or parole officer is poorly understood except for the familiar "police" or "authority figure" connotations, interlaced with the "we-they"

syndrome to a point that one would suspect some sort of sports activity pitting an offense against a defense. The most significant factor to this kind of jargon is, many clients do not believe it but live with it for the macho image and identification with others in population. However, the preponderance of time, myths, rumors and so on, and on and on, perpetuate the jail house beliefs and attitudes and tradition is carried on. The real and important questions, it seems, are: Will we permit this kind of 'bunk' to continue and do nothing more about it than we are today? Has this kind of thinking eroded the effectiveness and purpose of supervision? Is the damage somewhat analogous to nuclear radiation - roughly proportionate to the dose? Can we, conscientiously, let it continue through the next several years hoping that it will go away or do we challenge what may be defined as a 'latent counter-productive' issue? Is it conceivable in the years ahead for an attorney to prepare a brief with heavy emphasis being placed on the issue that his client did not fully know or understand what parole was all about?

These are just some of the misunderstandings associated with confinement that most assuredly, carry over and through the duration of supervision. These and many others contribute to a "bad" perspective as the client attempts to assimilate the entire picture of the parole process and his/her role and understanding.

THE CHALLENGE

The Board of Probation and Parole should implement a standardized, state-wide program aimed at dramatically increasing the client's knowledge, understanding and perception of the parole process

WE'VE GOT TO EDUCATE THE CLIENT - ABOUT PAROLE -
TECHNICALLY AND ACADEMICALLY.

Some experts project the 80's will produce an even younger 20's offender population, more assaultive and more likely to commit more sophisticated crimes. If true, and one holds to believe that the youthful offender is more susceptible to peer pressure, preconceived ideas (myths, rumors, etc.), then it becomes more apparent that we would institute a strategy to meet the challenge. If "People assigned to the Board for supervision have needs similar to the needs of other people," those needs, unequivocally, include the need to know what probation and parole are all about. The concept that education pays off is nothing new; the idea that we better educate and prepare the client is a challenging threshold that should add new and variable dimensions to future agency planning and success.

DIAGRAM OF WHAT CAN BE DONE

Obviously, the state correctional institutions are primary target areas for implementing the educational program. At Rockview, for example, a modern Education Building would provide the ideal physical attributes, i.e., the class rooms, audio and visual equipment, and an established "educational environment." (Initiating a Parole Education program would lend indirect support to the Bureau's education program - support that will not be discussed in this report). Other institutions have educational opportunity in various levels or at least, contain the necessary resources, space and learning centers.

On a pre-parole basis a minimum of six (6) parole education classes should be taught prior to release on parole. Each class should run at least 75 minutes on a formal basis, i.e., a teacher-student relationship. Classes should be held on a weekly basis - example: every Friday afternoon (3:15 to 4:30 p.m.), concluding as near to the client's effective parole date, as possible. The course of study should include a basic, elementary approach and explore the following areas of instruction:

PAROLE EDUCATION

Course Outline

A course study and instruction - offered by the Institution Parole Services Office.

Length: Six (6) Weeks

Classes: Each Friday afternoon - 75 minutes each class; 3:30 - 4:45 p.m.

Participation: Voluntary (Eligible by minimum expiration date).

CLASS I: This session takes a basic look at the Criminal Justice System and explores the different parts and distinct tasks of each component part of the system - A diagram focusing on parole:

- A. Police
- B. Courts
- C. Corrections
 - (a) County Prisons
 - (b) Probation
 - (c) Commitment
 - (d) Confinement
 - (e) PAROLE

CLASS II: A brief overview of the origin and history of parole:

- A. Parole roots
- B. In Pennsylvania
- C. Parole/Probation defined
- D. Types of Sentences
- E. Detainers (sentences, fines, costs and restitution)

CLASS III: Modern Day Parole. A professional human service agency. Philosophy and principles. Parole eligibility - pre-release:

- A. Parole plan (home, job, resources, etc.)
- B. Interpreting the Board decision
- C. Explaining OPT, in-patient therapy
- D. Institution adjustment (behavior/programs)
- E. Responsibility (Pre and Post release)
- F. Role of Institution Parole Services Staff

CLASS IV: Release on Parole:

- A. Conditions of parole
- B. Role of parolee (expectations, adjustment)
- C. Violations defined - CPV/TPV
- D. Presumptive Ranges for Recommitment - CPV
- E. Social responsibility
- F. The successful parolee/citizen

CLASS V: Success on Parole.

- A. Role of Parole Agent (Guest Speaker).
- B. Initial Release
- C. Goals
- D. Long range adjustment
- E. Supervision terminated

CLASS VI: A review and summarization session.

- A. Group Session
- B. Questions, comments and evaluation
- C. "Signing-out" on parole

INSTRUCTOR: R.A. Ricketts

NOTE: Your participation in Parole Education is voluntary, however, if you "sign-up" for the course, attendance at all six (6) classes is required.

The preceeding course outline is, of course, a general text of study that would appear most applicable to the intent and purpose of a parole education course of study. This outline has many and various possibilities, it would be totally remiss if comments, criticism, and personal opinion from nearly every Board employee were not solicited. At this point in time, the above outline should be considered a tentative plan until a complete feasibility study has been accomplished and the unlimited ideas, opinions and suggestions from other institution parole staff, Central Office staff and personnel, and field staff have been compiled to identify specific areas of priority. A standardized, comprehensive plan could then be established.

COMMENTS

The theme of this report and the main "ideas" have been discussed generally, highlighting only what is considered most important in a report of this size. Personal opinion is - the several areas explored in this report are so extensive that anything short of a text would be short-order-justice in relation to the kind of study the issue so rightfully deserves. Irregardless of the nomenclature, it is the main idea of this report that the writer is totally convinced ^{sh}ould have desirable and significant impact on every principle phase of the parole system in Pennsylvania.

One brief but final observation should also be recognized when the factors of costs, manpower, and physical resources are considered in implementing this kind of proposed program. The seven (7) SCI's hold the key to providing necessary classroom facilities and related equipment; assignment of a "Parole Education/Employment Specialist" to the Institution Parole Services Office could no doubt be accomplished from within our own system, perhaps on a "voluntary promotion" kind of transfer which would hold costs to a bare minimum. Additionally, the feasibility of implementing the program now at only one institution on a "pilot project" basis would also seem like an easy answer and a workable solution.

QUESTIONNAIRE

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Poor Good Very Good

1. On a scale of 1 to 10 how do you rate each of the six Parole Education classes (Use above scale).

Class I _____
Class II _____
Class III _____
Class IV _____
Class V _____
Class VI _____

COPY

2. Was the program helpful?

Yes _____
No _____
Other _____

Comments?

3. What suggestion(s) would you offer to improve the course?

SAMPLE ONLY

4. Your overall rating of Parole Education program (use scale above).



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA

BOARD OF PROBATION AND PAROLE
State Correctional Institution
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CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION

This is to certify that

has successfully completed the program

Parole Education

A voluntary course of study and instruction
offered by the Institutional Parole Services Office.

Best wishes for a successful future.

Official Signature

Date

CC: Central Office - PBPP
File

RE: Parole No.
Inst. No.

END